



**Executive Board of the
United Nations Development
Programme, the United Nations
Population Fund and the
United Nations Office for
Project Services**

Distr.: General
19 March 2024

Original: English

Annual session 2024

3 to 7 June 2024, New York

Item 1 of the provisional agenda

Organizational matters

**DRAFT Report of the first regular session 2024
(29 January to 2 February 2024, New York)**

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I. Organizational matters

- 1 The first regular session 2024 of the Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS was held in person at United Nations Headquarters from 29 January to 2 February 2024.
2. The Executive Board adopted the agenda and workplan for its first regular session 2024 (DP/2024/L.1), as orally amended, and approved the report of the second regular session 2023 (DP/2024/1). The Board approved the annual workplan for 2024 (DP/2024/CRP.1).
3. Decisions adopted by the Executive Board at the first regular session 2024 appeared in document DP/2024/9, which was available on the [Executive Board website](#).

Statement by the President of the Board

4. In his opening remarks, the President of the Board appreciated the important work of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS staff despite challenging circumstances, and paid tribute to the 152 members killed in Gaza. He described 2024 as beginning with unprecedented devastation, division and instability, where the Sustainable Development Goals have fallen off track. In reinvigorating international cooperation in the spirit of global solidarity and common goods, the United Nations needed to step up as the key actor towards uplifting the lives of people everywhere. The Executive Board had an important responsibility in guiding United Nations organizations to produce results, mobilize resources and ensure optimum utilization. He stressed reversing the redirection of funds from development initiatives, raising awareness to increase contributions to the regular budget and exploring new financing. He urged a continued emphasis on results, including through the midterm reviews of the UNDP and UNFPA strategic plans. He called on the Board to continue to strive for enhanced transparency and accountability; streamlining and institutionalizing improved practices of the last few years which could help prevent future risks. He described 2024 as crucial for multilateralism, with the world owing the next generations a better future.

Joint segment

II. Recommendations of the Board of Auditors

5. The Assistant Administrator and Director, Bureau of Management Services, UNDP, presented the report on the status of implementation of the recommendations of the Board of Auditors, 2022 (DP/2024/3). The officer-in-charge, United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), presented the report on the implementation of the recommendations of the United Nations Board of Auditors, 2022 (DP/2024/4). The Deputy Executive Director, Management, UNFPA, presented the report on the implementation of the recommendations of the United Nations Board of Auditors, 2022 (DP/FPA/2024/3). The Chief Financial Officer ad interim and Director of the Finance Group, UNOPS, presented the report on the implementation of the recommendations of the United Nations Board of Auditors, 2022 (DP/OPS/2024/1).

6. A group of delegations welcomed the unqualified audit opinions that all four entities received for 2022 while noting room for improvements. It encouraged the Board of Auditors to provide a summary of key findings and recommendations to enhance transparency and assurance. It stressed the importance of enhancing risk management and internal controls; encouraged including a statement of internal controls in financial statements; and called for enhanced interaction with the Executive Board on enterprise risk management and risks of strategic importance. For UNDP, it appreciated implementation of the majority of recommendations and noted a successful transition in the reform of the United Nations development system. UNDP should maintain its central role in the United Nations development system, including through further strengthening its integrator function. On UNCDF, it said that all 2022 recommendations were of high priority, with the majority relating to enterprise risk management, and pointed to weaknesses in governance, risk and internal controls. On UNFPA, noting the recommendations on supply chain management, it emphasized adequate resources to address recommendations and minimize risks. On UNOPS, it expressed concern on the low implementation rate of outstanding recommendations, deficiencies in project and grant management, project portfolio risks and issues on budgeting and pricing. It strongly encouraged a faster implementation pace and increased efforts to retrieve missing funds from the Sustainable Investments in Infrastructure and

Innovation initiative.

7. A delegation raised concerns about declining core contributions to UNDP; noted that UNFPA rejected a Board of Auditors recommendation on the reporting line of the Oversight Advisory Committee at UNFPA; and requested clarifications on staffing levels in the UNOPS internal audit and investigation group.

8. The Assistant Administrator and Director, Bureau of Management Services, UNDP, said it had not fully established the cost benefit of a statement of internal controls. With respect to its integrator function, as provided in UN development system reform, UNDP had made continuous progress and investments to further strengthen its capacity to formulate and provide integrated development solutions and effectively respond to country demands. In this respect, UNDP would continue to review, update and refine its internal strategies and processes to perform efficiently and effectively. The officer-in-charge, UNCDF, appreciated the reference to high-priority recommendations and emphasized progress. The Deputy Executive Director, Management, UNFPA, said that the supply chain management unit recovered costs through project fees; expanded resources had recently been approved. He stressed that the independence of the Oversight Advisory Committee was in line with best practices at other United Nations entities. The Chief Financial Officer ad interim and Director of the Finance Group, UNOPS, said the organization continued to implement the comprehensive response plan with significant milestones and progress that would be presented to the Board of Auditors. She described a comprehensive review of cost recovery and a plan for digital transformation and clarified current staffing numbers in the Internal Audit and Investigation Group.

9. The Executive Board adopted decision 2024/1 on the reports of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Capital Development Fund, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Office for Project Services on the implementation of the recommendations of the Board of Auditors, 2022.

III. Follow-up to the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board meeting

10. The Director, Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, UNDP and the Deputy Executive Director, Programme, UNFPA presented the Joint UNDP and UNFPA report on the implementation of the decisions and recommendations of the Programme Coordinating Board of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (DP-FPA/2024/1). The Director of the New York office of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) provided remarks.

11. A group of delegations welcomed significant gains in the global fight against HIV and AIDS but stressed more must be done. Progress was stagnant for key populations, especially transgender people. It stressed a whole-of-society approach, including by harnessing the collective assets of UNDP and UNFPA to reduce stigma, tackle discrimination and address human rights issues. It took note of the issues facing the Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS, as described in the recent Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment review of the UNAIDS Secretariat and the capacity assessment of the joint programme; stressed adequate resources for the joint programme secretariat and co-sponsors; and asked how evaluations would be used to strengthen ongoing work and collaboration. It expressed appreciation for a broad spectrum of results achieved by UNDP and UNFPA and called on both entities to expand and deepen partnerships with affected communities while continuing to safeguard HIV-specialized staff.

12. A delegation stressed that progress on HIV depended on recognizing diverse populations and unique needs and appreciated UNDP and UNFPA as crucial partners in supporting countries to reach the 10-10-10 targets and in reaching those left behind. It noted that the HIV response should be adequately resourced and driven by data, and called on Member States to increase funding, particularly to the UNAIDS Secretariat and co-sponsors, as well as to remove punitive laws and policies and address stigma and discrimination.

13. The Deputy Executive Director, Programme, UNFPA, welcomed supportive comments on redressing inequalities, the criticality of data-driven responses and the availability of resources, and pointed to a forthcoming new corporate strategy on HIV, sexually transmitted infections and

sexual health that was centred on an integrated approach. The Assistant Administrator and Director, Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, UNDP, said evaluations and assessments would be used to evolve and adapt the joint programme in line with the evolving context. The Director of the New York office of UNAIDS appreciated the collective commitment and efforts of UNDP and UNFPA.

14. The Executive Board took note of the joint report.

IV. Field visits

15. A member of the field visit to Senegal introduced the Report of the joint field visit of the Executive Boards of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP to Senegal (DP/FPA/OPS-ICEF-UNW-WFP/2024/1). The Head of Delegation for the Executive Board field visit to Uruguay presented a summary, pending a forthcoming report. The visit covered work on social protection, innovative financing for development, procurement, information systems, disability rights and inclusion, and the energy transition, among other issues. He described clear successes in teamwork and cooperation as well as needed improvements in integrating data and learning.

16. A delegation stressed the value of field visits to understand how decisions in New York impact on country level work and operations. It suggested reviewing the format to allow a freer exchange of opinions and emphasized substantive preparation for each visit. Representatives of all regional groups should take part to build knowledge.

17. A delegation stated that the link between field visits and formal Board sessions was less clear. The trend of seemingly limiting participants to bureau members constrained involvement by countries usually not nominated for membership in the bureau. He suggested revisiting the guidelines for organizing visits of the Board.

18. The Executive Board took note of the report on the field visit to Senegal and the presentation on the field visit to Uruguay.

UNDP segment

Statement by the UNDP Administrator and interactive dialogue

19. The UNDP Administrator (speech available on the [UNDP website](#)) described 2023 as a profound year of disruption, with the world experiencing a poly-crisis – extraordinary conflict, natural disasters, economic and financial shocks and increased polarization. For its part, UNDP remained a steady and reliable partner with its presence in 170 countries. Many instruments that UNDP had developed from working in crises – from stabilization to early recovery to reconstruction responses – gave the organization the confidence to step forward. The Administrator called for the Executive Board’s engagement and continued support to find ways, in collaboration with the United Nations family, to realize the ambitions of the humanitarian, peace and development nexus, and to respond in ways that reflected the needs of people in crisis settings.

20. As the world looked forward to 2024, UNDP represented a significant part of what communities, countries and the international community could hold on to. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was needed more than ever, and UNDP remained deeply invested in helping countries realize the development promise and the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda. UNDP remained laser-focused on the future of development as endorsed in its strategic plan. The upcoming midterm review was a moment to test the plan’s validity, relevance and response to an ever-evolving world. The capacity to pivot quickly while not losing sight of the UNDP mandate would be a critical litmus test. UNDP would continue to focus on countries and communities most left-behind as well as on those with the means to change development trajectories. UNDP remained an essential connector between the grass roots and the highest platforms for global policymaking, including the General Assembly and Group of 20.

21. UNDP was investing in key frontiers where development was evolving very rapidly, with emerging possibilities and risks. One example was digitalization. UNDP supported rapid

investment in digital ecosystems and digital public infrastructure with a rights-based lens on data and data protection. Another area was addressing climate change and the green transition, which were increasingly mainstreamed in development decision-making, and demonstrating how the world can still work together, notably through the recently agreed loss and damage fund. UNDP focused on finance for development to expand space for investment and reinforce how helping others to invest was a rational response. UNDP worked on public revenue for countries to invest in their own national development. It also worked on leveraging and multiplying the scope for private sector investment for capital markets. The Administrator described initiatives on governance through the lens of leaving no one behind and going beyond the ballot box. UNDP remained deeply committed to supporting fair, transparent and credible elections as well as to working on justice and human rights.

22. As a public institution, UNDP was investing in managerial effectiveness, accountability and innovations. The Administrator described UNDP as an institution with its “feet on the ground and eyes on the future”. The Accelerator Labs, the Sustainable Finance Hub, the Chief Digital Office and the new Sustainable Energy Hub were just some illustrations of how UNDP invested in competencies for the future of development. UNDP addressed risk management, accountability and oversight frameworks to live up to the highest standards. It was also ranked as one of the most transparent institutions. Its new enterprise resource platform in its first year processed over 1.12 million payments and created 15,000 projects across agencies. UNDP handled the payroll for over 44,000 United Nations staff.

23. UNDP remained extremely conscious of its mandate and the resources entrusted to it. The Administrator emphasized that UNDP was unequivocally committed to the independence of its oversight offices; delegates should have every confidence in their ability to operate independently. He described UNDP’s three lines of defense. The first line of defense was the project managers as risk owners; the second line monitored and oversaw risk; and the third line was the independent offices. On recent claims about the Funding Facility for Stabilization in Iraq, he emphasized that when UNDP was asked to operate in crisis and complex environments, there was no zero risk. This, however, in no way diminished the responsibility of managers or excused unacceptable actions; UNDP would pursue every instance where it could demonstrably prove corruption has occurred. He reminded delegates that thousands of people at UNDP delivered transparent, accountable, life-saving, developmentally focused services every day in difficult contexts. He concluded by emphasizing UNDP’s commitment to stay and deliver and bring the focus of development cooperation back to people. The promise of development and the promise of working together was extraordinarily important. UNDP in 2024 remained part of that promise.

24. A Vice-President of the Executive Board suggested frank dialogues on different obstacles, noting the shrinking margin of progress in middle-income countries and much needed structural changes. Climate action was essential and required international solidarity. A key concern was to mainstream a rights-based approach in all activities, including in digitalizing public services. The Vice-President called for not just leaving no one behind but for moving forward together.

25. A group of delegations noted great concern about the development outlook; gains could be lost. Collective action was required to salvage the Sustainable Development Goals, going beyond current efforts and delineated by political action and development finance. The group encouraged UNDP to enhance activities on affordable clean energy, provide practical inputs to address structural deficiencies in the international financial architecture, and work with all development actors to ensure continued engagement with States in crisis.

26. Delegations thanked the Administrator for a comprehensive report that highlighted critical areas needed to address development challenges. They emphasized investment in human security and resilient development to break the cycle of fragility, and called for addressing poverty and inequality as fundamental to forging a new social contract. They emphasized their appreciation for UNDP’s work on climate change and operationalizing the humanitarian, development, peace nexus, and encouraged UNDP’s continued collaboration on metrics going beyond gross domestic product (GDP). Delegations expressed concern about declining resources and appealed for the continued core funding of UNDP. They applauded UNDP’s efforts to reduce its administrative costs and commended UNDP for its excellent cooperation at country level, citing examples of

UNDP support to mobilizing domestic resources and the digitalization of tax services. Delegations also highlighted the value of UNDP in empowering and equipping countries with best practices and international experiences.

27. Delegations asked about ways to improve triangular and South-South cooperation. They called for more investment in productive sectors while highly appreciating work to foster inclusive economic growth and resilience. They lauded contributions to digitalizing public services, strengthening the ecosystem for inclusive development finance and supporting green energy transitions. Delegations encouraged UNDP to strategically seek partnerships with the private sector to maximize the impact of work on digitalization, asked for more information on civil society partnerships and expressed support for work on gender-responsive fiscal policies and tax reforms.

28. Delegations underlined the organization's crucial role as an integrator and accelerator of inclusive and sustainable development, and encouraged UNDP to enhance its integrator role in materializing the humanitarian, development, peace nexus approach. Given its critical role, UNDP should continue to collaborate with other multilateral stakeholders, including within the United Nations system to bolster its effectiveness. Several delegations stressed that risks must be addressed and mitigated and said that recent allegations of corruption in Iraq were a major concern. They thanked the Administrator for proactively addressing the issue, requested continued information and transparency, and questioned how UNDP would further strengthen systems to prevent corruption and misconduct. A delegation appreciated the commitment to operating in high-risk environments while upholding robust risk management practices, and asked how UNDP ensured that a risk-averse culture did not hinder effective operations.

29. Delegations recognized positive efforts to improve management effectiveness and translate the UNDP strategic plan into concrete actions to help developing countries better cope with a volatile external environment. A delegation asked for more detailed information on progress under the funding windows. Delegations described the Summit of the Future as an opportunity to fulfil financing commitments, reform the multilateral financial system, enhance the fairness of the digital and energy transitions, and make the United Nations development system fit for purpose.

30. In response, the Administrator described financing as the lifeblood of advancing development. UNDP, through its work on integrated national financing frameworks and SDG insights, offered tools to governments to review the full spectrum of public, private, domestic and national finance and make budget decisions with the greatest return on investment. He also referred to support to governments to increase domestic revenue through improving tax systems and highlighted the contributions of UNDP to mobilizing private investment through capital markets. The Administrator explained the organization's continued commitment to supporting initiatives that created investment ecosystems, built enabling policy environments and enhanced capacities to attract private capital at scale.

31. UNDP had invested heavily in greater efficiencies, gaining three cents on every dollar, but focusing mainly on a transactional and efficiency agenda could limit consensus and the value of the United Nations in development cooperation. It was a moment to find balance in addressing accountability and defining a development agenda that was not just articulated in targets and indicators but in practical responses to development concerns. He looked to the Summit of the Future to be bold in articulating effective cooperation despite differences.

32. The Administrator described improved risk management, including an enhanced policy, a risk appetite statement and guidance, updated risk categories, a chief risk officer, clarified risk management roles and responsibilities of all personnel, strengthened project-level risk assessment guidance, and dashboards to track and manage risk. UNDP had increased the protection of whistleblowers and invested in ethics.

33. He underlined the significant demand for support on digital and technology as well as climate change and green transitions as a development challenge. On the most scalable opportunities, he said these were in technology and financing. He ended by reminding delegations that the stabilization facility in Iraq had been an extraordinary success. Weaknesses would be carefully addressed. But these should not overshadow the achievement of the Government and

international community coming together at a moment of extraordinary disruption and creating a programme unlike any that came before.

V. Update on the Human Development Report

34. The Director, Human Development Report Office provided an update on the forthcoming 2024 edition of the report. He described three layers of uncertainty that would guide a series of the reports over the next few years. The 2024 report would look at polarization and how to break through gridlocks preventing people from coming together within and across countries. The following report would consider how digital transition was shaping prospects for human development. A subsequent report would delve into advancing human development in the Anthropocene. He described findings from the 2024 report, including links between perceptions of insecurity and political extremes as well as lower levels of trust.

35. The Director said that consultations to create the report were regional and thematic, involving hundreds of experts, policymakers, civil society advocates and members of the public at large. Other Human Development Report Office publications have recently included reports on gender social norms and multidimensional poverty. He stressed how the idea of going beyond GDP was something that animated work on metrics in the Human Development Report Office from its inception. An innovative new Human Climate Horizons platform would provide information on human development into the future, showing how climate change might affect different indicators.

36. A delegation asked for clarification about the theme of polarization. It said the report offered a good example of providing science-based, peer reviewed information to make better decisions. On beyond GDP, myriad variables impacted development and could not just be averaged out. The Human Development Report had demonstrated how UNDP can act as a think tank and provide state-of-the-art information on development.

37. The Director responded that polarization was not new but digital drivers were. The report would take a step back and focus not just on technology but on human choices, including around using technology. The office continued to invest in disaggregating the human development index, including through the use of satellite images and by training artificial intelligence algorithms.

38. The Executive Board took note of the update on the human development report consultations.

VI. UNDP country programmes and related matters

39. In his statement to the Executive Board, the Associate Administrator, UNDP presented nine new country programmes for approval and three for extension, including: the country programme documents for Bhutan, Brazil, Cambodia, the Gambia, Guinea, Madagascar, Mauritius, the Philippines and Seychelles; the third one-year extension of the country programmes for Sudan; and the second one-year extension of the country programme for Ukraine. He informed the Board of the first one-year extension of the country programme for Cuba.

40. The regional directors for Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean provided details from a regional perspective.

41. The Executive Board approved, in accordance with its decision 2014/7, the country programme documents for Bhutan (DP/DCP/BTN/3), Brazil (DP/DCP/BRA/4), Cambodia (DP/DCP/KHM/5), the Gambia (DP/DCP/GMB/4), Guinea (DP/DCP/GIN/4), Madagascar (DP/DCP/MDG/5), Mauritius (DP/DCP/MUS/5), the Philippines (DP/DSP/PHL/4) and Seychelles (DP/DCP/SYC/4).

42. The Executive Board approved the third and second one-year extensions of the country programmes for Sudan and Ukraine, respectively, as presented in document DP/2024/5. It took note of the first one-year extension of the country programme for Cuba as approved by the UNDP Executive Director.

VII. UNDP evaluation

43. The Director, Independent Evaluation Office, presented the evaluation of UNDP support to the digitalization of public services (DP/2024/6). The Director, Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, UNDP, presented the management response to the evaluation of UNDP support to the digitalization of public services (DP/2024/7).

44. A group of delegations described culturally sensitive and relevant digital programmes in the financial, judicial, governance, health, social protection and other sectors as encouraging. Yet the digital divide in some regions was wide and growing, with underdeveloped digital infrastructure the main factor. The group suggested that UNDP support a cross-border digital flows mechanism accounting for different levels of digital readiness, data maturity, and legal and regulatory environments, as well as regional data infrastructure to host advanced data-driven technologies. There were further opportunities to tap into South-South cooperation in information technology.

45. A group of delegations said it was inspired by the approach to advance digitalization to reach the Sustainable Development Goals and modernize UNDP. UNDP was a convener and catalyser of inclusive digital public infrastructure and accelerated digital delivery, and played an important role in digitalizing public services. It encouraged UNDP to further promote open digital solutions, mobilize operational capacity, coordinate closely with stakeholders such as the World Bank and United Nations Children's Fund, and continue working with a risk-informed and human rights-based approach. The group expected further improved quality in decentralized evaluations, monitoring and learning as fundamental to trust in UNDP and the regular inclusion of relevant stakeholders in all stages of evaluations.

46. A group of delegations said the many positive conclusions of the evaluation underscored the profound interplay between digitalization, public governance and sector development. A whole-of-government approach had not progressed significantly in countries at the early stages of digital development, however. It encouraged UNDP to integrate its support into broader public sector reforms and structured development partnerships. It said that digitalization programmes have often lacked strong embedding in local government structures, hindering the last mile digitalization of public services. Furthermore, an inclusive approach appeared to suffer from weak operationalization and inadequate mechanisms for monitoring the digital needs of vulnerable groups. On the need to better address data security and digital privacy, it asked for information on actions taken.

47. A delegation described how UNDP had supported digital development through digital literacy, engagement of the private sector and a digital platform to help citizens cope with higher energy costs. Another delegation urged UNDP to continue efforts to close the gender digital divide, to coordinate with other actors to prevent duplicated efforts, and to integrate cybersecurity in work on data privacy and legal identity management.

48. The Director, Independent Evaluation Office, responded to questions on strengthening the evaluation function by noting continued support for decentralized evaluations and plans to expand regional expertise. The Director, Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, confirmed that UNDP would work closely with partners to avoid duplication and to facilitate South-South and triangular cooperation. UNDP had a strong commitment to both digitalization for governance and the governance of digitalization. The Chief Digital Officer, UNDP, described a close partnership with the International Telecommunication Union. He highlighted localizing tools such as digital readiness assessments, and early results from efforts to enable financing for digital transformation. UNDP had been developing a guide on data privacy legislation and was beginning work on governance and policy frameworks linked to cybersecurity.

49. The Director, Independent Evaluation Office, offered a brief update on the upcoming review of the evaluation policy of UNDP. It would be carried out by external consultants, cover all aspects of the policy and include a benchmarking exercise against comparable organizations

50. The Executive Board adopted decision 2024/2 on UNDP evaluation.

UNFPA segment

Statement by the UNFPA Executive Director

51. In her opening remarks (see the [UNFPA website](#)), the UNFPA Executive Director stressed how advancing sustainable development amid unprecedented challenges starts with women and girls. Gender equality was the cornerstone. Thirty years ago, the world adopted the Programme of Action at the groundbreaking 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, setting the standard for people-centred development. Ever since, UNFPA had worked to deliver a more just, prosperous and peaceful world that puts human rights, including the right to plan one's own family, at the centre of development. She described progress, such as a 34 per cent decline in maternal mortality and a doubling in the number of women using modern contraception. Yet maternal mortality remains a global crisis and highlights stark disparities in health care. One woman in three will experience violence during her lifetime.

52. With 2030 around the corner, the Executive Director urged faster, more inclusive progress. The thirtieth anniversary of the Programme of Action was a chance to celebrate hard-won gains, rally new allies and push for greater action. She described events to mark the anniversary, including global dialogues on youth, demographic diversity and sustainable development, and technology and innovation.

53. As UNFPA galvanized momentum, it was looking inward to assure that it delivered more and better. The midterm review of the strategic plan and integrated budget, 2022-2025 was identifying implementation gaps and making plans to course correct, as needed. UNFPA was strengthening its capacity to identify emerging trends and threats and to plan and adapt accordingly, including through co-chairing the Lancet Commission on twenty-first century threats to global health.

54. UNFPA had prioritized optimization of its headquarters through two organizational changes: integrating the complementary functions of the current Policy and Strategy Division and the Technical Division into one new division, and relocating this division and the independent evaluation office to Nairobi, Kenya in the coming years. This would create greater opportunities for worldwide knowledge-sharing, capacity-building, visibility, and South-South and triangular partnerships. UNFPA would maintain a robust presence in New York to engage effectively with Member States. She described the relocation decision as based on extensive studies and consultations undertaken over several years. It was financially prudent, with an expectation to recoup one-time cost expenditures in three years.

55. The Executive Director welcomed the new UNFPA evaluation policy and a multi-year costed evaluation plan for 2024 through 2027 with a strong focus on humanitarian performance. On UNFPA funding overall, preliminary data showed sound performance in 2023 despite increasing pressure on core funding and growing humanitarian needs. For the seventh year in a row, UNFPA surpassed the \$1 billion mark, with total funding estimated at over \$1.4 billion for 2023. The ratio of core to non-core slipped to 27 per cent, however. She stressed that any reduction from a major donor or from exchange rate volatility could result in the failure to meet core targets, underlining the need for a pronounced change in financing.

56. The Executive Director described success in creating a more diverse, inclusive and respectful workplace, and making staff security and safety a top priority. UNFPA had reinforced measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment and prioritized investment in oversight offices. The Office of Audit and Investigation Services had invested heavily in a survivor-centred approach to investigations and expanded its investigative expertise. She concluded by appealing to Board members to do everything possible to help UNFPA weave a more equitable, prosperous and sustainable future, for women, girls and people everywhere.

57. The Regional Director, Asia and the Pacific, UNFPA, provided highlights on advances and challenges and changes in the operating environment due to climate change and demographic shifts. He described extensive needs in crises, including Afghanistan and Myanmar.

58. Three Executive Board Vice-Presidents delivered remarks. They appreciated the excellent results and said they were taking note of the optimization process and its impact on staff. Decisions taken 30 years ago must find new ways to achieve success; the thirtieth anniversary

was a chance to renew political commitment and speed up action. They stressed the importance of investing in young people and safeguarding the health and rights of women and girls in crises, and pointed to UNFPA leadership role in fostering innovative solutions to expand access to modern family planning, make pregnancy and childbirth safer, and empower girls and young people. The growing pushback against the rights of women and girls and their bodily autonomy made it more important than ever to stand up for sexual and reproductive health and rights. They asked how UNFPA was engaging with feminist civil society networks in the Global South and how donors could support a strong alliance to counter the anti-gender movement.

59. In a statement, a group of delegations expressed support for the UNFPA headquarters optimization and welcomed the move of key functions to Nairobi. A group of delegations recognized compelling reasons to recalibrate the organization's global footprint and align human resources to Africa as the region with the largest share of UNFPA spending. The group stressed transparency, trust and meaningful consultation, and called for a succinct, timely summary of issues related to effectiveness, coordination, engagement in intergovernmental negotiations and support to other regions.

60. Delegations welcomed the revised evaluation policy and called for strengthening country-specific evaluation. They emphasized a robust programme liaison branch in New York with relevant expertise at the senior level and stated that the relocation should not negatively impact the normative role of UNFPA or results at the country level.

61. Delegations underlined how demographic trends in global health, climate change and innovative technologies should guide future actions. They underscored universal access to tools guaranteeing the safe use of technology; systematic action on sexual and reproductive health in all phases of humanitarian responses; and a comprehensive women, peace and security perspective to safeguard the rights of women in conflict zones. They described the 2024 session of the Commission on Population and Development as key to reaffirming the Cairo agenda. The session had significant potential to offer solutions to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and could be a crucial input for the Summit of the Future. They welcomed the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit and looked for reflections on how to take them forward.

62. In response, the Executive Director described the challenges from the growing need for humanitarian services even as development was part of the answer to peaceful solutions. UNFPA responded to government priorities and sought to change attitudes across societies and economies. Building new alliances and talking with people who may not always agree would be important to put women and girls at the centre of development. The thirtieth anniversary was a chance to try harder to find common ground and make the fundamental ideas of population dynamics and demographics understandable to the regular person.

63. The upcoming organizational changes drew on extensive analysis and engagement with staff and had a long lead time. Over 80 per cent of positions had already been matched against current staff; all human resources processes would be fair and transparent for all staff, with special attention paid to general service staff, whose jobs could not be transferred. Normative work and engagement in New York would remain a top priority. She appreciated the continued guidance.

64. UNFPA was currently enhancing its collaboration with the private sector and international financial institutions to promote a global agenda that genuinely included and fully integrated women and girls. Specific endeavours to strengthen ties with the Global Financial Facility were aimed at positioning not only the United Nations but also ensuring seamless engagement among sector stakeholders in addressing issues related to sexual and reproductive health and rights, given the increasing involvement of the Global Financial Facility in this area.

65. The Executive Director reported that UNFPA was getting closer to 100 Member State donors contributing to core. In response to crises, UNFPA was working with the Inter-agency Standing Committee and Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs on assuring that gender-based violence in emergencies remained integral to protection, something that women's groups everywhere were demanding.

66. On demographics and fertility rates, UNFPA did not shy away from explaining that nowhere in the world has ordering women to do something related to their fertility met with success in increasing or decreasing the number of children they have. UNFPA teams have developed

evidence on how technology facilitated gender-based violence affected women and girls while emphasizing that technology can also be beneficial.

67. The Deputy Executive Director, Management, UNFPA, noted that a fact sheet on organizational changes was being prepared and would be shared. Both internal and external experts found that the divisions being moved mostly interacted with country and regional offices instead of other headquarters divisions. He described an active risk register that was being monitored. The Deputy Executive Director, Programme, stressed the need for an amplified voice for women, youth, social movements and others in implementing the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Programme and Development. The Director, Programme Support Division described efforts to diversify resources with the private sector, international financial institutions and programme countries, and the development of a strategy for innovative financing, including a strategic investment facility. The Director, Humanitarian Response Division described the importance of the Humanitarian Trust Fund in enabling rapid responses to crises in Afghanistan, Sudan and Ukraine.

VIII. UNFPA evaluation

68. The Director, Independent Evaluation Office, presented the UNFPA evaluation policy (DP/FPA/2024/1) and the multi-year costed evaluation plan, 2024-2027 (DP/FPA/2024/2).

69. A group of delegations stated that the renewal of the UNFPA evaluation policy came at the right time, reflecting necessary adjustments. It supported proposed changes, including coordination with other oversight functions, reporting lines for decentralized evaluations and coverage of all evaluation types. It appreciated the recalculated evaluation function funding target and supported a proposed phased approach towards an evaluation pooled fund. The group asked about country and regional office capacities to enhance the relevance and quality of decentralized evaluations, and steps to minimize disruptions from the optimization plan.

70. A group of delegations noted the effort to balance flexibility and predictability while making evaluations adaptive, innovative, independent, impartial and rigorous. It supported efforts to align the evaluation policy with treaties and other instruments widely adopted by Member States, adding that national context and values, laws, policies and institutional frameworks should guide implementation. A decentralized approach had potential to improve programme implementation through early detection of performance and implementation gaps, and could enhance capacities to conduct country-level evaluations. In line with the evaluation norm of national evaluation capacity, creating opportunities for experience and knowledge-sharing upon the request of governments would enhance performance, along with the alignment of evaluation activities with government planning cycles and evaluation mechanisms. The group asked for more information on how artificial intelligence would be used to gather reliable data and produce analysis, given the prevailing digital divide.

71. In response, the Director, Independent Evaluation Office, described a two-tier strategy to strengthen country and regional office evaluation capacities. New staff teams were dedicated to decentralized evaluation and humanitarian evaluation. Enhanced guidance would support multiple kinds of evaluations as would new forms of interregional learning. A gradual approach to implementing the policy would start with a focus on higher-value agreements with more potential for learning and accountability. He stressed strengthening national evaluation capacities and alignment as key, and described how work with new technology must be consistently ethical and responsible. Work with artificial intelligence would build on a strategy to reap benefits while minimizing risks. He indicated that the relocation of the office would open new opportunities to collaborate with other United Nations organizations on joint and system-wide evaluations.

72. The Deputy Executive Director, Management offered a management response, stating that the relocation was based on compelling evidence and aimed at better delivery for women and girls. He referred to a survey finding that evaluation colleagues spent 74 per cent of their time collaborating with partners outside New York; much of the rest of their time involved engaging with colleagues who would also relocate. He reiterated that the entire process was being closely managed and monitored by senior management. The Deputy Executive Director, Programme

thanked delegates for supporting the evaluation function as a critical source of knowledge for programmes.

73. The Executive Board adopted decision 2024/3 on UNFPA evaluation.

IX. UNFPA country programmes and related matters

74. The Deputy Executive Director, Programme presented an overview of new UNFPA country programme documents for Brazil, Bhutan, Cambodia, the Gambia, Guinea, Madagascar, Nicaragua, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines, and a third one-year extension for Sudan.

75. The regional directors for Asia and the Pacific, East and Southern Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and West and Central Africa provided details from their regional perspectives.

76. The Executive Board approved, in accordance with its decision 2014/7, the UNFPA country programme documents for: Bhutan (DP/FPA/CPD/BTN/8), Brazil (DP/FPA/CPD/BRA/7), Cambodia (DP/FPA/CPD/KHM/7), the Gambia (DP/FPA/CPD/GMB/9), Guinea (DP/FPA/CPD/GIN/9), Madagascar (DP/FPA/CPD/MDG/9), Nicaragua (DP/FPA/CPD/NIC/10), Papua New Guinea (DP/FPA/CPD/PNG/7) and the Philippines (DP/FPA/CPD/PHL/9).

77. The Executive Board approved the third one-year extension for Sudan (DP/FPA/2024/4).

UNOPS segment

X. Statement by the UNOPS Executive Director

78. In his opening remarks ([available on the UNOPS website](#)), the UNOPS Executive Director described the outstanding work of UNOPS colleagues in challenging development, humanitarian and peace and security environments. In Gaza, this included delivering fuel to enable humanitarian responses in critical sectors such as health, food, water, sanitation and hygiene. In the over 85 countries where it works, UNOPS was dedicated to delivering meaningful action, including in particularly conflict-affected or fragile contexts such as Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Ukraine and Yemen.

79. The Executive Director described the year 2023 as about continuing important work to rebuild trust with partners and communities following the mismanagement crisis. The Executive Board support in developing a comprehensive response plan to address the recommendations of the two independent third-party reviews to strengthen internal controls had been crucial. UNOPS had tirelessly implemented the recommendations in connection with the comprehensive response plan that was guiding the internal management reform efforts of UNOPS. Through its robust and effective implementation of the plan, UNOPS had made strides in restoring trust, even as it delivered \$2.7 billion worth of projects in 2023. Of 43 original recommendations put forward by the independent third-party reviewer, 32 were completed by the end of 2023, 7 more would be completed in 2024, 1 would continue until 2027 and another was led by the UN Office of Legal Affairs. Two recommendations were not operationalized as UNOPS closed down the workstream connected with the former Sustainable Investments in Infrastructure and Innovation initiative A follow-up independent review confirmed commitment to the ongoing implementation of the comprehensive response plan.

80. The restated strategic plan 2022-2025 placed a strong emphasis on expanded capacity for implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, with organizational culture reform a critical step forward. Achievements included internal reorganization, new senior recruitment and transformation initiatives. A new culture unit supported reforms on long-standing issues around people management, accountability, leadership approaches and ways of working. UNOPS was focusing on evidence, insights and learning; strengthening capacity to develop, sign and deliver quality projects and programmes; ensuring that processes and information systems were fit for purpose and were integrated and leverage digitalization; reviewing the policy framework and revising financial regulations and rules while strengthening the risk management framework; and ensuring transparent management for net-zero revenues. The organization had worked hard to

distribute excess reserve funds to over 250 partners; of a total of \$124 million, it had received instructions for \$98 million, which was distributed by the end of 2023.

81. The Executive Director thanked the Executive Board for leadership and guidance on the reform agenda and new project engagements, and for helping to improve the organization while it continued to serve people in need. He reiterated a full commitment to reforms but stressed the need to overcome the implementation gap at a moment of poly-crisis. He concluded by calling for more focus on UNOPS activities and practical solutions for peace, sustainable development and climate action.

82. The Chief of Staff, UNOPS, provided additional details on progress on the comprehensive response plan, stressing it was driving management reform transformation, and clarifying that the recommendation that would continue until 2027 involved a multi-year initiative on process innovation and digitalization. The Chief Financial Officer, ad interim, delivered a brief statement on the UNOPS proposal to handle undistributed excess reserves. UNOPS had recommended extending the timeline of the refund exercise until 31 December 2024 to settle the majority of cases and drive overall performance from almost 80 to more than 95 per cent. The Director of the People and Culture Group delivered a brief statement on UNOPS organizational culture, touching on key aspects of United Nations principles and values, such as diversity and inclusion, commitment to sustainability, professionalism and results orientation. Strategic cultural transformations have been underway through reforms covering accountability, processes and investment in people.

83. A Vice-President of the Executive Board highlighted the essential nature of trust in institutions and encouraged UNOPS to continue fully executing the recommendations of the comprehensive response plan. An effective flow of information on progress was important. Efforts relating to the reimbursement of excess reserves should continue, accompanied by informing the board on progress.

84. A group of delegations recognized the role of UNOPS in capacity-building, project implementation, creative resource mobilization and technical assistance. UNOPS should not be discouraged from implementing its mandates and pursuing innovations. It commended the dual approach of corrective actions and work to reorient the strategic plan 2022-2025. It looked forward to a portfolio that helped programme countries, including in maximizing their ability to attract new flows of development funding. The group appreciated measures to strengthen the ethics office and the creation of the Deputy Executive Director position for management and policy, risk and compliance. On plans to present proposals for revised regulations and rules at the Board's second regular session in 2024, it encouraged timely and necessary Member State consultations.

85. A group of delegations stated that UNOPS was heading in the right direction, but the reform work was not complete. While the timeframe to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals was decreasing, and there was clear demand for UNOPS services, transparency and trust must be the foundation for moving forward. The UNOPS portfolio should remain within its mandate. The group looked forward to a fully elaborated strategy on organizational culture, stressing the need for staff consultations. Reforming organizational culture and building trust would depend on accountability, underscoring the crucial importance of fitting consequences for all individuals found guilty of any form of misconduct.

86. A delegation noted progress on refocusing UNOPS towards its original mandate but reiterated the importance of the enhanced mobilization of resources for infrastructure development and a greater focus on capacity-building in procurement and project management services. This would help bring back lost trust among different stakeholders, in addition to ensuring the independence and oversight capacity of UNOPS.

87. A delegation encouraged UNOPS to assess hidden and underlying risks and suggested further strengthening the oversight role of the Executive Board. Another delegation emphasized developing a clear workplan with measurable milestones to enhance the organizational culture and implement new and efficient working methods. A delegation requested more detailed information on the information technology transformation strategy. It predicted growing demand

for infrastructure services but expressed concern over a continued lack of technical expertise in bankable infrastructure projects, welcoming further clarification of the role of UNOPS. Delegations repeatedly stressed fulfilling all aspects of the comprehensive response plan and the recovery of all funds. One delegation called for making UNOPS the model for an organizational culture that attracts the best talent, delivers high-quality projects and restores unconditional trust across all partners.

88. In response to delegations, the Executive Director stressed a commitment to keeping Board members informed as crucial to the reform agenda and restoring trust. He welcomed a dual approach to reform and delivery; everything that UNOPS did was based on its mandate and strategic plan, with a stringent engagement acceptance modality. He indicated that UNOPS was eager to partner with members of the Board and other organizations to play a role in infrastructure. On bankable projects, UNOPS would work only on the demand side and support other organizations and developing countries in gaining technical assistance and building capacity. He appreciated a positive reaction to the organizational culture strategy and emphasized ongoing interactive dialogues with personnel. UNOPS had in some cases gone beyond what was planned, such as in developing a code of conduct and looking towards improved performance management systems.

89. The Director, People and Culture Group, described next steps in reshaping the organizational culture to align with United Nations values and norms. A third-party organization would help design ways forward; further steps would entail developing tools, policies and performance management systems. The Chief of Staff highlighted work on risk management, including specific frameworks for anti-bribery and corruption, an integrated risk and compliance group, training on risk management skillsets for mission-critical roles, and the integration of risk assessment into strategy, budgeting and target-setting processes, among others.

90. The Executive Board adopted decision 2024/4 on the comprehensive response plan in response to the recommendations of the two independent third-party reviews on UNOPS, decision 2024/5 on UNOPS organizational culture, and decision 2024/6 on UNOPS distribution of excess reserves to paying entities: UNOPS proposal on the alternative use of undisbursed funds.

XI. Other matters

Address by the Chairperson of the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS/UN-Women Staff Council

91. The Executive Board heard a presentation by the chairperson of the UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS and UN-Women Staff Council. Given losses among United Nations personnel, he reminded delegations of the responsibility to ensure their safety and security. Recent efforts to improve staff engagement, such as the UNDP employee listening architecture, were welcome but unmanageable workloads have become a serious concern. At UNOPS, improvement in overcoming a culture of fear was happening more slowly than expected. He described how the council was participating in the headquarters optimization process at UNFPA, noting ongoing efforts to make the process people-centered, fair and transparent. Staff were extremely concerned about potential organizational risks related to the transition; a risk analysis and clear matrix of success were recommended. The Staff Council welcomed the review of the use of non-staff personnel and related contractual modalities to address ongoing challenges to appropriate use.

92. A group of delegations commended the dedication of United Nations staff amid multiple crises. It said that creating a safe, inclusive, welcoming, enabling and open working environment was not easy but should remain a collective goal. It encouraged taking all measures to ensure that working for the United Nations was a positive experience, free from discrimination, racism, sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment or any other form of oppression or mistreatment. It asked about collaboration across United Nations staff councils; steps the council takes to support more inclusive, safe and open organizational cultures; and whether support for the council was sufficient.

93. A delegation expressed hope that engagement with the staff council would become a permanent agenda item. It asked for an update on the council's extension of representation to

non-staff.

94. The council chairperson welcomed making engagement with the Board a regular agenda item. He described system-level collaboration across three federations of staff councils and associations in the United Nations. The staff council participated in diversity, equity and inclusion as well as gender equality initiatives, and had seen significant engagement with management and an openness to discussing policy issues. He stressed that involvement in change processes needed to happen early. The council had developed a modality where non-staff could become associate members but had been informed that this contradicted staff rules; it was a “space” that was not yet settled. He described significant internal solidarity between staff and non-staff, and underlined that it was not satisfactory to have 70 per cent of the workforce without representation.

95. In response, the officer-in-charge, Office of Human Resources, UNDP, confirmed that creating a working environment that was inclusive, respectful, and free from fear and any form of harassment and discrimination remained a key priority, including in a new diversity, equity and inclusion strategy. A speak-up culture programme was successfully piloted. UNDP was proactively engaging with offices and teams that did not do well in a recent staff survey to define root causes and better responses. Other steps included strengthened leadership accountability and avenues for staff to share views on leadership. On a new non-staff contractual modality, she described detailed guidelines for use and continued feedback that drove recent policy changes.

96. The Director, Division of Human Resources, UNFPA, referred to regular meetings with the staff council and allocating one position to it that could not be realigned, retrenched or moved away. She expressed appreciation for concerns about ongoing changes but suggested these would create new opportunities and position UNFPA more strongly. Human resources teams were working hard to provide career coaching and remained particularly mindful of the concerns of general service staff who cannot be relocated under staff rules.

97. The Director, People and Culture Group, UNOPS, described several initiatives to cultivate a more positive organizational culture and affirmed the commitment to supporting the people management competencies of managers. A forthcoming Joint Inspection Unit report would be pivotal in balancing staff contracts and individual contractor agreements, given the nature of how UNOPS operates. UNOPS had begun revamping its whistleblower mechanism. Senior management had repeatedly encouraged the formation of local personnel associations. Staff representatives participate in dedicated forums to address concerns, foster dialogue and promote a culture of openness.

Adoption of the tentative workplan for the annual session 2024

98. During the adoption of the tentative workplan for the annual session 2024, a group of delegations, referring to the inclusion of an agenda item on the third-party assessment of the governance and oversight functions of the Executive Boards, indicated the need for an in-depth consideration of the recommendations contained in the report, so that all members were given sufficient time and opportunity to conduct necessary consultations for their effective participation. The group noted the responsibility of the Board in carefully reflecting on the implications of those recommendations related to the structure and functions of the Board, and that these discussions were framed by and contributed to the fulfilment of the mandate of the General Assembly: providing intergovernmental support to and supervision of the activities of each fund or programme in accordance with the overall policy guidance of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, in accordance with their respective responsibility as set out in the United Nations Charter, and to ensure responsiveness to the needs and priorities of recipient countries.

99. The group called for member-driven, phased, inclusive and balanced intergovernmental discussions on this issue at the annual session.